

Lee named Chief Judge of Court of Appeals

March 3, 2011

Judge L. Joseph Lee has been appointed as Chief Judge of the Mississippi Court of Appeals. Mississippi Supreme Court Chief Justice Bill Waller Jr. made the appointment and administered the oath of office to Chief Judge Lee on Thursday, March 3.

Chief Judge Lee, 65, of Jackson, will serve as administrative head of the Court of Appeals until Dec. 31, 2014. Judge Lee takes over the leadership position previously held by Chief Judge Leslie D. King, who was appointed to a vacancy on the Supreme Court. Justice King was sworn in March 1.

Chief Justice Waller said, "I have great confidence that Judge Lee will carry on the legacy of Chief Judge King."

Chief Justice Waller noted Judge Lee's lengthy legal, judicial and administrative experience. He has practiced law for more than 37 years. He has served for 12 years on the Court of Appeals, and has been a presiding judge for six years.

Chief Judge Lee said, "I am truly humbled and appreciative of this great honor."

"I appreciate the Court of Appeals, and I'm proud to have been a part of that development during the past 12 years. I look forward to its continued success," he said.

The Court of Appeals began hearing cases in January 1995. The Legislature created the intermediate appellate court to relieve a backlog of cases before the Supreme Court, and to speed up the time it took to render decisions. The appellate courts are required to render decisions within 270 days of the filing of the final brief. The Court of Appeals currently takes an average of 214 days.

The 10-member Court of Appeals hears cases assigned by the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court has discretion over whether to review its decisions. If the Supreme Court declines review, the Court of Appeals decision stands.

Judge Lee was first elected to the Court of Appeals in November 1998 and took office in January 1999. He has served as one of two presiding judges of the Court of Appeals since 2004.

Judge Lee was born in Poplarville and grew up in Lamar County. He attended the University of Southern Mississippi and the former William Carey College, now William Carey University. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree from William Carey and a law degree from the former Jackson School of Law, now Mississippi College School of Law.

During high school and while he was an undergraduate, he supported himself and his family by working in the funeral home industry. He attended law school at night while working as a high school teacher and principal.

Judge Lee began practicing law in Jackson in 1973. In 1975, he bought funeral homes in Jackson and Rankin County. He ran the funeral homes for 20 years while also practicing law.

Judge Lee was honored as Mississippi College School of Law's 2004 Lawyer of the Year, and he was presented an Honorary Master of Laws in 2009. The University of Southern Mississippi honored him with its Juris Sodalitas Distinguished Public Servant Award in 2007.

Judge Lee worships at St. Paul's Catholic Church, where he serves as an usher and greeter.

He is married to the former Renee Simon. He has two sons, a stepdaughter and two grandsons.

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